

Schools of Promise Project (SOP SIG)

FAQs for Clerk/Business Managers

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SOP SIG CONTACTS

Financial (Questions about accounting, and to ask about status of payments)
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DEFINITIONS

District SOP SIG Plan – The plan established by the District Planning Team, approved by the trustees and approved by the OPI, for activities and services under the Schools of Promise School Improvement project. This plan is necessary before the district can fully participate in the project. The approved plan will result in a contract between OPI and the district covering OPI's agreement to provide certain goods and services to support the SOP SIG activities (e.g., instructional materials, curriculum materials, research-related tools and consultation service of experts) and reimbursements for certain salaries, benefits, and staff travel costs for approved activities.

Schools of Promise (SOP) – The Schools of Promise project will address improvements in academic achievement at 4 of Montana's lowest achieving school districts. It is funded by a federal grant from the U.S. Department of Education (USDE) to the MT Office of Public Instruction under the ESEA Title I, Part A - School Improvement Grant (ARRA SIG). The SOP districts are Frazer Public Schools, Lodge Grass Public Schools, Pryor/Plenty Coups Public Schools, and Lame Deer Public Schools.

Intergovernmental Service Agreement (ISA) - A contract between OPI and a school district. OPI will use various ISAs with the SOP districts for this project. The OPI does not plan to award pass-through grants to districts. Instead, the OPI will enter into ISAs with each district and reimburse them for the activities specified in the ISA and related to their efforts to implement the SOP SIG project goals. In some cases, the OPI will pay directly for certain services and goods.

ARRA School Improvement Grant (ARRA SIG) – Federal grant used for the SOP-SIG projects. The main funding for the projects comes from the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA).

OVERVIEW - GENERAL INFORMATION

Q: What are the goals of the SOP SIG project?

A: The federal SIG grant provides funding to bring about reforms in the schools having the state's lowest 5% achievement in Math and Reading. The efforts will include staff training, temporary placement of OPI staff and contracted staff into the schools to lead the school in best practices to improve academic successes, and implementation of well-researched curriculum materials and programs along with staff support for the implementation.

Q: How long does the SOP-SIG project last?

A: The project is funded using an ARRA SIG grant. This project may last up to 3 years, beginning July 1, 2010 and ending September 30, 2012. Many of the reimbursable expenditures will be salaries and benefits.

Q: How will the SOP districts plan their activities for this project?

A: Starting in June 2010 and going through early August 2010, districts convene District Planning Team meetings to plan the SOP SIG activities. OPI's Transitional Leaders will lead the planning meetings in preparing a plan and budget for the next 3 years. OPI must approve the district plan and the plan budget before the SOP SIG project will be funded at the district. OPI may add restrictions to the plans to address known financial, academic, or administrative problems.

Q: How will the SOP districts be funded for SOP SIG efforts?

A: At this point, OPI intends to support efforts by reimbursing the school districts for certain agreed-upon services and purchases. OPI does not plan to award pass-through

grants to the SOP districts. One district, Hays Lodgepole, may later qualify for a subaward.

Q: How will SOP districts receive their funds?

A: After the District Plan has been approved by OPI, the approved activities will determine how funds will be provided. For example:

- a) Most districts will provide longer school days and some will extend the school year to include more days. SOP districts will send claims to OPI to report the staff time and the salaries and benefit costs incurred for the additional staff time, and OPI will reimburse these according to the approved district plan and contracts between OPI and the districts. OPI will provide a tracking sheet to use for these claims.
- b) Some districts may need specialized equipment, such as computers. OPI will work with the district to purchase and install the equipment as needed. In some cases, OPI will directly purchase goods and services, make orders, and pay the vendors. In other cases, OPI will authorize the districts to make limited purchases of goods and services and bill OPI for reimbursement.
- c) Some purchases may be partly funded by the SIG project through OPI and partly funded using district funds. OPI payments may be made based on claims for reimbursement submitted by the district.

DISTRICT PLANNING TEAM

Q: Who are the District Planning Team members?

A: District Planning Teams have students, teachers, administrators, community members, board members, and parents. Teams were established by the district and approved by OPI. Team membership cannot be changed except upon written approval by OPI.

Q: How will the District Planning Team meetings be funded?

A: Between July 1 and August 4, 2010, OPI contracted with the SOP districts to pay the costs of the initial District Planning Team Meetings. The contract covered these costs, subject to some restrictions, such as:

- Only the District Planning Team members approved by OPI will be paid for.
- District staff team members: The district will pay the school staff who serve on the team their normal hourly salary. The district may send OPI a claim for the staff salaries for the District Planning Team meetings.
- Board member team members: OPI will contract individually with any board members who serve on the teams to pay them honorariums for their service in attending team meetings, because state law does not allow the district to pay board members an honorarium. OPI will pay them \$22 per hour.
- Student and community member team members: The district will pay these participants \$22 per hour and may send a claim to OPI for reimbursement of that payment plus any applicable benefit costs incurred.

Subsequent District Planning Team meetings will likely require further contracts.

SIG PLAN

Q: What's the SIG Plan? Does finance have any part in the SIG Plan?

A: The SIG Plan is the district's overall plan for improvement using the SIG grant moneys. The SIG Plan will be developed by the District Planning Team under the guidance of the SIG Transformational Leader assigned to the district. The SIG Plan must include the goals for district reforms and must state how the funding under the SIG grant will be used to achieve the changes needed to reform the district toward improved student academic achievement. The district must create a budget for the project, which will be submitted as part of the SIG Plan. OPI will review and approve the SIG Plan. The approved SIG Plan will be the basis of all SIG expenditures for the district. Expenditures for activities that are not approved under the SIG Plan won't be reimbursed by OPI.

Significant, sustainable school Improvement might require changes and corrections in accounting and budgeting processes. As part of the SIG Planning process, the district should review the need for reforms in the district's business processes and address those problems in the SIG Plan goals and activities, if necessary. For example, SIG grant funds could potentially be used to contract certain professional consultants to help the district analyze and restructure its procedures or to resolve accounting or budgeting problems that will result in improved business office functions. Any contracting activities must be built into the SIG Plan. *OPI may require districts to address known significant financial problems in the SIG Plan as a requisite for the project, whether or not grant funds are necessary for these activities.*

SIG TRAINING SESSIONS

Q: How will travel costs and salaries/benefits be covered for school staff who attend SIG trainings?

A: OPI will contract with the SOP districts to send their staff to appropriate training sessions. Based on approved agreements, OPI will reimburse the district for the salary, benefits, and travel costs at state rates based on district claims submitted to OPI. The district should be sure to confirm with OPI what costs will be covered before sending staff to trainings, to ensure there is mutual understanding of the reimbursable costs.

STAFFING

Q: Who are the people who will work under the SOP SIG project?

A: OPI hired several staff to lead the program from Helena. Additionally, OPI hired or contracted with several school districts to provide staff to work in the SOP school districts.

The staff OPI hired or contracted for this project and their assignments are as follows:

Staff in Helena

Nancy Coleman (OPI Staff) – SIG Coordinator

Sarah Pierce (OPI Staff) – School Advocacy Specialist

Frazer

Jennifer Cunningham (OPI staff) – Transformation Leader

Carolyn Rusche (Wolf Point SD Staff) – Curriculum and Instructional Coach

VACANT – School Board Coach (Part Time)

Lame Deer

Jo Swain (OPI Staff) – Transformation Leader

VACANT- Curriculum and Instructional Coach

VACANT – School Board Coach (Part Time)

Pryor / Plenty Coups

David Stringfield (OPI Staff) -- Transformation Leader

Calli Rusche Nicholson (Great Falls SD Staff) - Curriculum and Instructional Coach

Stevie Schmitz (OPI Staff) – School Board Coach (Part Time)

Lodge Grass

Corri Smith (Great Falls SD Staff) - Transformation Leader

Angie Collins (OPI Staff) - Curriculum and Instructional Coach

VACANT – School Board Coach (Part Time)

All SOP Districts

Donny Wetzel (OPI Staff in Billings) – Youth and Community Outreach Coordinator

Courtney Peterson (OPI Staff in Billings) - Curriculum and Instructional Coach

Q: Will any staff of the SOP districts be paid using SOP SIG funds?

A: Yes, the SOP schools will, in some cases, be reimbursed for salaries and benefits paid for the SOP school staff under approved district SOP SIG plans. The project is expected to include extending the school day or school year, finding new staff in some cases, and revising teacher and principal evaluation practices. These activities will involve more hours per day and/or per school year to achieve the reforms that are planned. For example, if a district's approved SOP SIG plan includes staff working on afterschool programs, the OPI may approve the district SIG plan to include a reimbursement for the SOP SIG staff to work the extra hours needed for the afterschool program.

Q: The staff is currently covered by a union contract or negotiated agreement. How will the SOP district get staff to provide additional hours without causing conflict with the union contract or negotiated agreement?

A: The trustees are responsible for renegotiating agreements or extending contracts with staff as necessary to provide additional services under their approved district SOP SIG plan.

Q: If a district's approved SIG plan includes OPI reimbursement for additional staff hours, how will the district claim reimbursement? How will OPI make the payment?

A: The SOP district should track the hours and related salaries and benefits on the OPI SIG Staff Tracking Sheet:

http://www.opi.mt.gov/pdf/SchoolFinance/ARRA/TrackingSheet_SIGSalaryReim.xls

The business manager should submit the sheet to OPI monthly or quarterly to claim reimbursement for the salaries and benefits.

EXPENDITURES AND REVENUES – ACCOUNTING & CLAIMS

Q: What tools are available for helping track expenditures and claim SIG reimbursements?

[SOP –SIG District Travel Reimbursement Claim Tracking Sheet for SIG Salary Reimbursements](#)

Q: How should the SOP school district clerk record expenditures and revenues for the SOP-SIG project?

A: Even though OPI will not be awarding a grant to the districts, OPI will, in most cases, be reimbursing the district for its program costs for approved activities. The district should account for the expenditures and receipt of the money as if it were a reimbursement-type grant award.

Clerks should set up a project reporter code in the district's Miscellaneous Programs Fund 15 (i.e., Fund 115 or 215) for the SOP-SIG project. The SOP-SIG project can be run through one or both (elementary and high school) Fund 15's. If only one is used, OPI recommends using the high school fund, 215 because many of the project activities will involve the high school programs.

In most cases, the district will spend funds for approved activities, then claim reimbursement from OPI. Record expenditures in the SOP-SIG project in Fund 15 using expenditure program code 753. Immediately claim reimbursement from OPI. When OPI reimburses the expenditures, record the receipt using revenue code 7530.

Alternatively, the clerk might spend money from a particular district fund, submit a claim to OPI for reimbursement, and then journal voucher the expenditure into the SOP-SIG project in Fund 15 when the reimbursement is received. As long as the expenditures

and revenues both are finally recorded in the Fund 15 project for SOP-SIG, either method is acceptable.

Q: How should the district claim a reimbursement for SIG expenditures?

A: The method of claiming reimbursement depends on the type of expenditure. OPI will only reimburse costs that are preapproved by OPI or included in the District's SIG Plan.

1. Salaries and benefits- Submit the "OPI SOP SIG Tracking Sheet for SIG Salaries" posted at:

http://opi.mt.gov/pdf/SchoolFinance/ARRA/TrackingSheet_SIGSalaryReim.xls

NOTE: Some salaries and benefits will be for events, such as training, and other salaries will be for extending school days and school years. Name the event on the form, or state that the claim is for time related to extending the school day or extending the school year.

2. Honorariums for Student and Community Participants on the District Planning Team – Submit the "OPI SOP SIG Tracking Sheet for SIG Salaries" posted at:

http://opi.mt.gov/pdf/SchoolFinance/ARRA/TrackingSheet_SIGSalaryReim.xls

3. Supplies- Submit a letter on district letterhead describing the purchase. Attach a copy of the district's paid invoice. This might include books, computers, etc.

4. Travel costs - OPI has a generic version of the District travel Reimbursement form to use to claim travel costs for staff travel related to SIG:

http://www.opi.mt.gov/pub/index.php?dir=pdf/SchoolFinance/Events/&file=10_11_SOP_SIG%20Dist%20Travel%20Claim%20Form.xls

5. Contracted services – Submit a letter on district letterhead describing the contracted services, and attach a copy of the district's paid invoice.

Q: How long will it take to receive a reimbursement after sending a claim to OPI?

A: Assuming all documentation is adequate and the claim is for pre-approved costs, OPI can normally process a reimbursement payment within 3 to 4 days. Claims may take longer to process if the district delays its requests, sends numerous claims at one time, or submits claims during the ordinary fiscal year-end work spikes for OPI staff, June 1 to July 30.

Q: What if OPI denies a claim?

A: OPI might deny a claim for reimbursement if costs were not properly pre-approved by OPI or if the claim is not documented adequately. If a claim is denied, OPI will notify the district clerk and superintendent the expenditures must be paid using other district funds, such as general fund or Impact Aid funds. If the expenditures were originally recorded in Fund 15 in the SOP-SIG project, the clerk must journal voucher the costs to a different fund.

The way to avoid claim denials is to make sure costs are for approved activities and all documentation is retained in an organized manner for each payment. Many

reimbursements will be made for salaries and benefits, so clerks will have to maintain a tracking system for the reimbursable staff time.

Q: What tools are available to help the clerk track expenditures on the project?

A: NOTE: Most reimbursements will be offered by OPI on an ISA contract. Maintain a file of these contracts.

Tracking Sheet for Reimbursable Salaries and Benefits: OPI Excel spreadsheet for tracking and reporting salaries and benefits for meetings and training events for which reimbursement may be offered is posted at:

SOP-SIG District Travel Reimbursement Form: Use this form to claim travel for staff trainings, etc.

AUDITS AND MONITORING

Q: What additional audit requirements are there on the paperwork for this project?

A: The SOP districts should expect to provide the same level of documentation needed for any grant project. The money will only be paid to the district if the activity has been approved by OPI. Expenditures and reimbursements will be strictly monitored by OPI under the approved District SIG Plan.

The district must retain all payroll, travel, and purchasing records for audit. Districts with past audit issues related to payroll, travel, or purchasing records should expect to be subjected to more rigorous financial scrutiny by OPI and auditors.

SOP SIG District Expenditures and Claims

8/16/2010

-- Use fund 15, create a project reporter code for SOP-SIG, record using expenditure program code 753 and revenue code 7530. If you claim indirect costs, record the indirect cost recovery as shown in the School Accounting Manual, [Section 9-0200.40](#).

Expenditure Type		How to Claim Reimbursement	Restrictions	Comments
Salary and Benefits	Staff	<p>Use OPI's Excel spreadsheet for tracking and submit a signed hardcopy as a claim for reimbursement.</p> <p>Remember to state the dates and event description on the claim.</p> <p>--Track time for each event separately.</p> <p>-- If time is for extending school day/year rather than event, use that as the event description.</p> <p>State the OPI contract (ISA) number if applicable.</p>	<p>For training sessions in Billings, OPI will pay staff travel time as follows:</p> <p>Frazer to Billings- 10 hours travel time per staff member who attends.</p> <p>Lame Deer to Billings- 3 hours travel time per staff member who attends.</p> <p>Pryor to Billings- 2 hours travel time per staff member who attends</p> <p>Lodge Grass to Billings- 2.5 hours travel time per staff member who attends</p>	<p>The district may have to amend staff contracts if staff will be working extra hours for training events.</p> <p>EVENTS for staff will likely include:</p> <p>-- District Planning Mtgs (On site, only staff on the OPI-approved District Planning Team are reimbursed)</p> <p>-- Training related to SIG (often will be in Billings, but may be on-site or in other locations)</p>
	Superintendent	N/A – OPI will not pay supt time because their time is already covered by a salaried contract.		

Expenditure Type		How to Claim Reimbursement	Restrictions	Comments
	Principal/Asst. Principal	<p>Depends on whether time is part of the person's contract. If not, OPI will reimburse the time.</p> <p>IF TIME IS REIMBURSEABLE, use same claim method as staff time (see above).</p>	<p>For District Planning Meetings, OPI will only reimburse for people on the OPI-approved District Planning team.</p> <p>For training sessions in Billings, the same travel times as listed under "Staff" above will apply to Principals/Asst. Principals.</p>	
Honorariums for Student and Community Members <p>-- Students on the District Planning Team- \$22/hr</p> <p>--Community Members on the District Planning Team-\$22/hr</p> <p>--Usually, a small honorarium is not accompanied by any benefits. If the district has to pay benefits on this, OPI will reimburse that cost, too.</p>		<p>Use the OPI Excel form for tracking time, and submit a signed hardcopy of the form as a claim.</p> <p>-- Attach a sign-up sheet to the claim to prove who attended.</p> <p>State the dates and event description on the claim. Keep track of time for students and community members by separate event.</p> <p>State the OPI contract (ISA) number if applicable.</p>	<p>OPI will only reimburse the district for student and community members who are on the OPI-approved District Planning Team to participate in local District Planning team Meetings.</p> <p>Travel time is not covered.</p> <p>OPI anticipates roughly 10-15 Planning Team Meetings in SY 2010-2011, each lasting 3-6 hours.</p> <p>(Additional special events may be added later and approved by OPI.)</p>	<p>The district may need to issue 1099s because some participants will earn over \$600 per year. Check with the district's auditor for advice, if necessary.</p> <p>NOTE: Don't pay board members this honorarium. OPI will contract with them individually and will pay them directly.</p> <p>EVENTS for students and community members will likely include:</p> <p>-- District Planning Team (on-site meetings, OPI-approved team members only)</p>

Expenditure Type	How to Claim Reimbursement	Restrictions	Comments
Supplies	Submit a signed letter/invoice on district letterhead. Attach a paid invoice.	--As approved by OPI under District SIG Plan	Most supplies will be purchased by OPI directly.
Travel Costs	Submit a signed hardcopy of the SOP-SIG District travel Reimbursement Form --Attach lodging receipts.	As approved by OPI under District SIG Plan. Usually, reimbursement is limited to state rates. OPI will only reimburse costs paid by the district.	
Contracted Services --As approved by OPI under District SIG Plan. --District should have a written contract or purchase order.	Submit a signed letter/invoice on district letterhead. Attach a paid invoice for contracted services.	Service must already have been provided. OPI cannot pre-pay for contracted services.	In most cases, OPI (not the district) will contract for services to provide additional assistance when needed.